

Jordan



BEING PREPARED AND ACTING FAST:

A series of case studies on UNICEF's role in the delivery of effective social protection responses to COVID-19

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Jordan:

A swift operational response strengthens the building blocks of a shock-responsive social protection system

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF and partners worked with the Government of Jordan in a rapid and coordinated response strengthening key components of the national social protection system. UNICEF provided support for the formulation of Jordan's National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2019-2025, expansion of the National Aid Fund (NAF), and enhancement of the national unified registry, all of which were key in ensuring a timely and coordinated response. The lessons learned from the response, including coordination mechanisms and operational advancements, are now being integrated into ongoing efforts to ensure the national social protection system is well-equipped to face ongoing and future shocks.



Sidra, 13 years, is in sixth grade. “Mom bought us shoes, notebooks, pens, sharpeners and erasers,” says Sidra excitedly. “I love them so much because the old ones were ruined. I like school. I want to learn here and paint and read and write!”

“Hajati (a UNICEF cash transfer programme) helped solve a lot of the challenges that we face,” says Amina, a mother of six children from Syria living in Jordan. “It’s impossible to keep your children in school when you have no stationery, school bags or shoes.”

“Now I have dignity,” she says. “Hajati support comes in the form of a cash withdrawal. It makes a difference not to have to queue up at a charity to receive help.”

Source: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/global-annual-results-2020-goal-area-5>

Context

Jordan has a young population, with 63 per cent of its population under 30 years old, one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, and growing levels of national debt. Furthermore, over 41 per cent of the labour force works in the informal sector. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative socio-economic impact on the country, with the economy estimated to have contracted by 1.6 per cent in 2020, unemployment increasing to 24.7 per cent in the last quarter of 2020, and youth unemployment reaching 50 per cent.

At the start of the pandemic, the Government of Jordan introduced a package of measures to protect the most vulnerable households affected by the pandemic. A Social Protection Response Committee (SPRC) was set up, headed by the Minister of Social Development, and included the Director Generals of the National Aid Fund (NAF) and the Social Security Corporation (SSC), as well as a representative from the private sector and three large local NGOs – Jordan Red Crescent, Tkiyet Um Ali (TUA), and the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO). The Committee announced a package of cash support to 355,000 poor and vulnerable households including recipients of the NAF monthly cash transfers, the recently launched Takaful cash transfer programme, as well as 200,000 additional vulnerable households who received temporary in-kind support in the form of food baskets for six months (financed by the SSC and NGOs).

UNICEF's Response and Results

Gathering evidence and analysis: UNICEF contributed to the Inter-Agency Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA) in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The findings indicated a clear and immediate impact on refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in terms of their ability to access food, income and medical needs; however, the RNA also highlighted concerns regarding the continuity of education, access to WASH facilities, as well as increased protection risks for both adults and children, especially within the extremely vulnerable and marginalized populations living in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS). A socio-economic assessment of households with children

and youth also took place in the second half of 2020 when the government lifted the lockdown and sectors started to gradually open up. The findings indicated additional financial challenges on households, increased violence, a digital divide, and families adopting negative coping mechanisms to meet basic needs during the recovery period.

Supporting coordination and preparedness: UNICEF joined the COVID-19 Response Task Force and was assigned as co-chair of the Common Cash Facility (CCF), with a focus on promoting an interagency cash delivery platform. CCF members coordinated payment distribution by staggering payments, mapping recipients with the objective of avoiding any duplications, and reducing crowding by ensuring social distancing at ATM sites. Simultaneously, UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Bank, supported the government to strengthen the preparedness and response of the national social protection system, with a focus on ensuring a quick and effective response to vulnerable families: RapidPro (a two-way short message service (SMS) platform), shared by UNICEF, was used to facilitate communication, identification, registration, verification and information dissemination and was integrated with the NAF MIS system. Furthermore, enhancements were implemented on the cash transfer MIS to accommodate and reflect targeting and payment updates. Simultaneously, UNICEF and the World Bank provided technical assistance and advice in terms of targeting, payments and innovative communication modalities.

System building and effective delivery: Since 2018, UNICEF, in collaboration with the World Bank, has been a well-established partner to the NAF, supporting the development and operationalizing of the NAF expansion plan through the following:

- *Providing support to enhance the government's NAF MIS system to identify the most vulnerable households:* UNICEF supported NAF to develop their MIS to expand their existing programmes and develop new ones to support an additional 240,000 beneficiary households in a two-month period. Using lessons learned from support provided in the Hajati cash transfer programme, UNICEF was able to effectively enhance the NAF programmes in terms of design and implementation, which led to the horizontal and vertical expansion in the

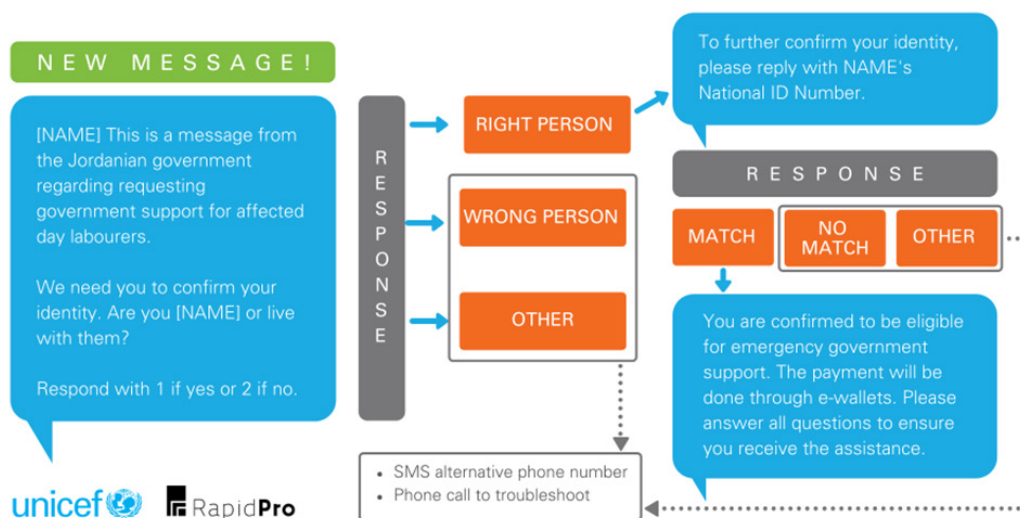
social protection response¹, which was technically and financially supported by the World Bank, UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF.

- *Expanding the Hajati programme to support vulnerable children, 94 per cent of whom were Syrian refugees:* In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, UNICEF expanded its Hajati cash transfer programme, increasing the reach from 11,435 to 30,239 children living in host communities and ITS. Of the total recipients, half were girls, 15 per cent were children with a disability or chronic illness, and 30 per cent were from female-headed households (which is higher than the national average of 12 per cent). According to the April 2020 Hajati dashboard, nearly all (98 per cent) recipients thought that the assistance was provided in a timely manner, and recipients reported spending the cash transfer on food and water (66 per cent), followed by rent (17 per cent), medication (12 per cent) and hygiene products (4 per cent).
- *Developing a RapidPro SMS platform, a two-way SMS and digital communication tool, to register applicants, collect key data and monitor the implementation of the programme.* Over 240,000 vulnerable households received cash assistance. The platform was used for identification, information validation, and to open and

register mobile wallets. To date, over 98 per cent of the total population have been paid. The RapidPro verification process connected the SMS flows to the registration portals of financial service providers, which facilitated the opening and activation of beneficiary mobile wallets remotely. UNICEF is also using these tools to strengthen the grievances and complaints mechanism.

- *Providing an integrated package of social protection services through the Makani programme:* UNICEF supported the Makani programme which provides learning support services, community-based child protection, skills training and early childhood development activities through a network of community-based centres. Over 40 per cent of households that received cash assistance from UNICEF's Hajati programme also received these complementary services. At the onset of the pandemic, staff and volunteers supported these communities remotely by raising awareness on COVID-19 safety measures and the government's online platform, as well as resilience building practices, early childhood development activities and online support to parents, caregivers and children. In 2021, efforts began to effectively link the Makani programme to the NAF's Takaful programme, the Takaful plus initiative.

Figure 1: Flowchart illustrates the ID verification process conducted through SMS messages for the Hajati cash transfer programme.



1 Vertical expansion of an existing programme or set of programmes refers to temporarily increasing the benefit value or duration of the programme for some or all existing recipients (e.g. top-ups). New components may also be added. Horizontal expansion of an existing programme or set of programmes refers to temporarily including new beneficiaries from affected communities.

Partnerships

Since 2018, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNHCR and WFP have been supporting Jordan's largest social protection programme with technical and financial support – including the National Unified Registry – in addition to the creation of the NSPS 2019-2025. UNICEF was able to leverage its established partnership with government and key partners to support an effective strategy to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, UNICEF and the World Bank provided support to the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) and NAF to mobilize the national social protection system, identifying options and measures, enhancing the targeting model to include informal workers, and strengthening social assistance and integrated social protection services, reaching almost 400,000 beneficiaries. In operationalizing the NSPS, UNICEF has also formed critical partnerships with local NGOs, particularly through the Makani programme.

Lessons Learned

The pandemic provided an opportunity to strengthen the shock-responsiveness of the system: The national social protection system played a key role in responding to the crisis. Work on preparedness and strengthening different components of the system, including different coordination mechanisms and management information systems continues. Building on this experience, UNICEF is working with the government to strengthen the existing system and to articulate a new shock-responsive social protection chapter to the NSPS, which UNICEF helped develop and launch.

The scalability and flexibility to make rapid adjustments to programme design features and administrative systems was key: Time was of the essence as the lockdown impacted people's livelihoods and included an imminent bank closure. In just two weeks, UNICEF Jordan was able to scale up Hajati to include 18,804 additional vulnerable children. Furthermore, the ability to ensure communities benefited from both the cash assistance and complementary services, linking the Hajati and Makani programmes, was key in enabling UNICEF to tailor its interventions to meet community needs.

The COVID-19 response illustrated the need to support the MOSD to ensure efficient and sustainable social spending: This entailed analyzing social protection expenditures from an equity perspective, in addition to undertaking an analysis of the distributional implications of selected reforms linked to contributory and non-contributory social protection measures using both static and dynamic modelling.

Way Forward

Working towards a shock-responsive social protection system: Work is underway to distill and apply the lessons learned from the social protection response to COVID-19 and support the government to further strengthen the system to respond to future crises, in addition to addressing longer-term poverty and social vulnerabilities. Work is focused on:

- *Social protection policy and system strengthening* to expand coverage and children's access to integrated and inclusive social protection services.
- *Generating evidence on child poverty and social protection.* The socio-economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will push a significant number of children below the poverty line and lead to higher levels of multidimensional poverty and deprivation. UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and Department of Statistics, is conducting a nationally representative survey to understand the types and extent of multidimensional deprivation(s) faced by children and youth in Jordan. The report will provide practical information on deprivation to inform the design and implementation of policies and programmes to enhance the ongoing COVID-19 and humanitarian response as well as longer-term recovery and reconstruction.
- *Direct social protection programme implementation.* UNICEF is working with the MOSD to develop a shock-responsive social protection system for the country. The first steps towards this include inclusion of a chapter on shock-responsive social protection in the NSPS, and establishing an Implementation Support Unit (ISU) hosted at MOSD to support the management and coordination of activities related to the NSPS.

- *Conducting a social protection public expenditure review*: In collaboration with ILO, UNICEF is supporting the government to produce a social protection public expenditure review to assess the effectiveness and

efficiency of public spending on social protection and the impact of these investments on sector outcomes, especially for targeted groups.

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